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## **An exploration of children's experiences of art in the classroom**

### **Abstract**

Despite the numerous benefits art has for children research suggests that there is a lull in the development of expression in children's drawings during the primary school years and that many children give up on art between the ages of 10 and 12. Research investigating this phenomenon has taken an educational focus and aimed to identify potential shortcomings in the primary education system which could impact negatively on children's artistic development and interest in art. This paper builds on previous educational research by exploring children's perceptions of the art education they receive. In this small exploratory study semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 children in each of the Key Stages of English compulsory education - Key Stage 1 (5 - 6 year olds); Key Stage 2 (7 - 8 year olds); Key Stage 3 (11 – 12 year olds) and Key Stage 4 (14 -15 year olds). A qualitative thematic analysis is used to explore children's experiences of art in the classroom, the kinds of support they receive in art lessons and how art lessons can be improved. It is hoped that the exploration of children's experiences of art in the classroom will enable movement towards an engaging and relevant approach to art education.

**Key words** – art education, pupil voice

## **The importance of art for children**

Hargreaves (1989) argued that both researchers and educators agree that it is essential that children receive a good art education. The proposed benefits of engaging in art activities are numerous as it is suggested that art allows children to express their ideas (Chapman, 1978) and develop their creativity and imagination (Arnheim, 1989; Dyson, 1989). It is also argued that art allows opportunities for personal development as it enables children to gain confidence and promotes feelings of self worth (Barnes, 2002; O' Connor, 2000). Given the potential benefits art has for children research which suggests that there is a lull in the development of expression in children's drawings during the primary school years (Davis, 1997; Jolley, Fenn & Jones, 2004) and that children give up on art at around the age of 10 or 12 (Golomb, 2002; Matthews 2003) is a cause of concern.

## **Research exploring the decline**

Research exploring the decline in children's artistic development and their interest in art has focused on examining the educational factors that Davis (1997) and Jolley et al. (2004) have suggested shape children's engagement with art. This body of research points towards a number of problems within the English primary school education system which could result in an inadequate art education. The first issue relates to training. Many primary school teachers report that they are embarrassed by the limited drawing ability (Cox, 1992) and that teacher training did not adequately prepare them to

teach a specialised subject (Clement, 1994). This reported insecurity has been linked to a shortfall in children's educational experience (Ford, 2003).

The second issue focuses on the English art curriculum. Hallam, Lee and Das Gupta (2007) suggested that three teaching positions are presented in this document; an expert position which requires teachers to develop their artistic skills, a facilitator position which requires teachers to give children freedom to express themselves and the philosopher position which requires teachers to develop children's knowledge of what art is and how it can be interpreted. Within the curriculum each teaching position is given equal weight and this suggests that teachers need to strike a balance between these three positions in the classroom. However, the curriculum does not offer practical guidance on how this balance can be achieved. When interviewed about their teaching practices primary teachers reported that they favour the position of expert or facilitator (Hallam Das Gupta & Lee, 2008). This imbalance was also reflected in their teaching practice as teachers generally adopted the position of expert or facilitator when teaching art (Hallam, Lee & Das Gupta, 2011). The proposed gap between curriculum and teaching practice suggests that children receive an inconsistent art education which places emphasis on skills development or free expression during the primary school years.

### **What do children think?**

Research exploring art education gives a valuable insight into the issues faced by primary teachers in the classroom. As such it offers some explanation to Holt's (1997) observation that many children view art as a

pointless activity and leave primary school with less confidence in art than they originally had. It also offers potential ways forward by identifying a need for training and support relating to applying the principles outlined in the curriculum in the classroom. However, it is important to note that children may not share the same concerns and values as adults (Kellett, 2005). As children are the recipients of art education, research is needed to address what issues they consider to be important and how art education can be improved.

Information provided by children about their experiences of art in the classroom could inform the development of a 'child friendly' approach to art education which is engaging and relevant. The importance of attending to the student voice is stressed in the *Every Child Matters* (2003) and *Youth Matters* (2005) policies which suggest that students should be consulted on educational decisions and policy that will affect them.

Research within developmental psychology has also demonstrated a move towards hearing children's voices. **Burkitt, Jolley and Rose (2010)** interviewed and surveyed parents, teachers and children to explore children's drawing experience. This large scale research involved collecting data from 29 English schools (primary and secondary). Survey data (which included open ended questions and Likert style questions) was collected from 270 children, 44 teachers and 146 parents. The children's sample consisted of 30 children in each year group that runs from Year 1 (5 -6 year olds) to Year 9 (13-14 year olds). Broadly speaking the survey questions related to children's experiences of drawing and the developmental decline, the kinds of help children receive when drawing (at school and at home), the kinds of help they would like to

receive and the difficulties faced by adults when supporting children's drawing activities (Burkitt et al. 2010). Data collected from the children suggested that their drawing experiences were generally positive. There was no evidence to support the developmental decline in drawing as children in all age groups indicated that they spent both time and home and school engaging in drawing activities. Children also reported that they enjoyed drawing and felt confident in their drawing ability. When discussing the kinds of help that they received in the classroom children recounted strategies such as providing a graphical demonstration, altering the children's drawing, giving encouragement and there was also the suggestion that teachers should not help as the drawing belonged to the child. These strategies were also spoken about in relation to the kinds of help that children give each other in art lessons. As such it seemed that children were well supported in art lessons and many children felt that they did not need extra help in art lessons.

The results from Burkitt et al.'s (2010) survey research gives insight into children's drawing activities and the kinds of help they receive in art lessons. The different perspective offered by this research suggested that from the child's point of view there is no decline in drawing activity and that children receive the support that they need in art lessons. This raises challenges for the majority of research within developmental psychology which proposes a decline in drawing activity and suggests that a lack of specialist teaching means that the English education system is failing to adequately support artistic development. The current exploratory research aims to further explore these challenges by investigating children's experiences of art in the

classroom. In contrast to Burkitt et al.'s (2010) research the current research uses qualitative methods to exclusively examine children's experiences. This enables a further examination of the issues raised by the survey research by allowing a more in-depth analysis of the responses offered by the children and an investigation in to the value children place on the kinds of help they receive in art lessons.

Research conducted by Faulkner and Joubert (2006) demonstrated the advantages of allowing children to take an active role in the research process. These researchers facilitated a research project in which children in Year 5 (9-10 years), Year 7 (11-12 years), Year 8 (12-13 years) and Year 9 (13-14 years) worked with creative professionals to examine creativity in schools. During this project children designed and conducted research aimed to explore where creativity happened in the school, how creativity informed learning and the kinds of creative things that pupils would like to see happening in their school. The majority of children who participated in the research reported that their school was creative. The children also put forward suggestions on how to help make learning effective and make lessons more creative. More specifically, pupils asked for clearer explanation of learning objectives, more advice in lessons and more trips outside of school so learning could take place outside of the classroom. The approach adopted by Faulkner and Joubert (2006) gave children the freedom and space needed to address issues that they considered to be important. As such it enabled a unique insight into the matters children felt were important in their school and investigated issues relevant to children that may not have been considered

important by adult researchers. While the current research does not invite the children involved to design and conduct the research the qualitative methods utilised aimed to give the children more freedom to set the agenda and explore the issues important to them.

## **Methodology**

### *Participant information*

In order to explore the differing experiences of children who belong to each of the Key Stages of the English National Curriculum semi-structured interviews were conducted in three Derbyshire schools – two primary schools and one secondary school. Interviews were conducted with children belonging to each Key Stage of compulsory education. Key Stage 1 was represented with interviews with Year 2 children (6 - 7 years old), Key Stage 2 was represented with interviews with Year 6 children (10 -11 years old), Key Stage 3 was represented with interviews with Year 9 children (13-14 years old) and Key stage 4 was represented with interviews with year 11 children (15 - 16 years old).

Before the interviews took place all the children in classes participating in the research took home a consent form which gave details of the study and asked parents/caregivers to indicate if they gave permission for their child to participate in the study. The class teacher collated all the returned consent forms and was instructed to put forward 6 children (equal numbers of girls and boys if possible) who had permission to participate to the researcher. When making the selection the teacher was asked to choose children of a range of

artistic abilities and interest in art. Children who had been put forward by the teacher were then asked individually by the researcher if they consented to participate in the interview and all children agreed to this request. Key Stage 1 and 2 children gave verbal consent and Key Stage 3 and 4 children signed consent forms. At the close of the interview all children were debriefed and thanked for their assistance.

In total 24 children (10 males and 14 females) took part in the research. This sample size is not uncommon in qualitative research due to the rich insight gained from semi structured interviews and the labour intensive, time consuming processes that qualitative researchers go through during data collection and analysis (Willig, 2009). In line with this, the current research does not seek to make generalisations or generate theory (Willig, 2009). Instead, this exploratory study aims to gain an in-depth insight into the experiences shared by this group of children. An exploration of the issues relevant to these children can then be used to consider if larger scale research projects are warranted in this area.

### *Data collection*

Each of the interviews were dyadic, with just the researcher and the child present, and they took place in a quiet area of the child's classroom. The interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule which was divided into two sections. The first section of the interview focused on the exploring the child's art values. The child was given laminated cards of well known pieces of art which demonstrate



different artistic styles - Mona Lisa by Da Vinci, Cornfields by Constable, Water lilies by Monet, Kiss by Klimt, The Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dali, Marilyn by Andy Warhol and 3 by Jackson Pollock. The children were asked to rank the art in order of preference and discuss what they liked/disliked about each piece of artwork. After the child completed this task they were asked to discuss a piece of art they had created which they were particularly proud of. The child was instructed to bring along the artwork to the interview as a prompt for discussion. The second part of the interview focused on investigating the children's experiences of art in the classroom. Questions in this section centred on what makes a good art lesson; the possible issues and difficulties children face during art lessons; the kind of support children receive in art lessons from the teachers and their peers need and what changes children would like to see implemented to improve art lessons. All interviews were recorded using digital recorder and transcribed verbatim for analysis. **Therefore, in this study the data corpus was made up of the full transcripts of all the interviews. Due to the focus of the current paper the analysis centred on the second part of the interview in which children spoke about their experiences of art in the classroom.**

### ***Analytic approach***

The interview data were then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of qualitative analysis aims to identify and explore coherent themes that run throughout the interviews. Within thematic analysis a theme is considered to be a "patterned response or meaning within the

data set” which captures “something important about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 82). In order to identify themes the interviews were collected together to form one large textual base. The data set (which in this case corresponded to the second part of the interview in which experience in the class room were discussed) were then read a number of times. The data set was first read to gain familiarity with the content and then re read at a deeper level to consider the meanings presented in the interviews and identify common themes that ran throughout them. Therefore, the themes presented in the following analysis were identified using an inductive or bottom up approach which involved reading though the text with no pre determined hypothesis in mind. This type of analytic approach is appropriate as it suits the exploratory nature of this study and ensures that the themes discussed in the analysis are closely tied to what the children considered to be important and not a pre conceived research agenda.

It is important to note that the following analysis is informed by a social constructionist framework. Within this framework language is not seen as a ‘window to the mind’ or an externalisation of cognitive processes. Instead, language is considered to be a subject of study in its own right (Abell & Stokoe, 2001, p. 418). Therefore, the following analysis does not aim to investigate and access people’s thoughts and motivations (Wooffitt, 2001). The analysis centres on exploring how children construct are lessons and the experiences they have in their lessons.

This focus on language and experience creates an important distinction between thematic analysis and other forms of qualitative data analysis such as content analysis (Wilkinson, 2000). Typically, content analysis identifies a set of categories present in a qualitative data set and then counts the number of times each of these categories appear (Silverman, 2001). A thematic analysis systematically identifies themes which run throughout the data set but does not aim to quantify the prevalence of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such the following analysis uses the convention established within thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 11) in which phrases such as “the majority of participants” (Meehan et al., 2000: 372), “many participants” (Taylor & Ussher, 2001: 298), or “a number of participants” (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003: 249) are used.

## **Analysis**

When discussing their experiences of art in the classroom three main themes emerged in the interviews. These themes related to (i) the art experience (ii) the kinds of support received in art classes and (iii) the ways in which the art experience could be enhanced within school. Each of these themes are explored below using quotes which best exemplify the theme and the wider data set.

### **The art experience**

All the children interviewed spoke positively about their experiences of art in the classroom. This section of the analysis examines how this enjoyment was facilitated and restricted.

## *Enjoyment*

### Extract 1

*Interviewer: Would you, you know If you got to choose would you like to do art every week? Or every day?*

I would like to do art everyday because I love it, it's my favourite

*Female Year 6 student*

### Extract 2

*Interviewer: Do you enjoy most of them or?*

Yeah definitely I really enjoy art lessons

*Interviewer: Yeah and obviously you chose it for an option when you got to choose them. So what sort of drew you to choose art as an option then?*

Well I always used to draw and stuff, like my mum was like you're good at it why don't you take it. I've always like enjoyed it at school, like when we had to take it. I always enjoyed it; it was my favourite lesson, it still is

*Female Year 11 student*

These extracts demonstrate that students across age groups suggested that art was their favourite subject. In the first extract art is presented as something the student wants to do 'every day' because they 'love' it.

Repeated use of extremes in relation to the desired frequency of art and the 'love' of art are used to construct a strong preference for the topic.

The second extract explores the origins of a student's enjoyment for art. Here, art is construed as something that they have 'always' done and had a flair for.

In the last line of the extract enjoyment of art lessons is discussed in the past and present tense. This indicates that this student has received a consistent and enjoyable art experience in school throughout her education. This

enjoyment, flair and support from her mother are aligned with her choice to pursue art when it stopped being a compulsory part of the curriculum.

Therefore, internal factors (talent for art) and external factors (good art lessons and parental encouragement) are positioned as the ingredients needed for continued engagement with art.

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### Extract 3

Yeah it's just like really relaxed in art so you can go round and see what other people are doing and help each other it's quite fun, I'd like that more in other lessons to be honest

*Male Year 11 student*

Enjoyment of art was also discussed in relation to relaxation and freedom. In the extract above art is presented as a different type of lesson in which students are able to interact and view each others work. This creates an informal atmosphere that provides the space to the space to relax and unwind – an example of good practice that could be applied to other subject areas.

This supports Barnes' (2002) observations that art lessons give children the space to escape the pressures of the curriculum and let off steam.

### *More choice*

When reflecting on their experiences of art many students discussed the limited choice they had in art lessons. It appeared that students did not have much opportunity to make their own choices in terms of the subject matter they worked with or the media they used until they were in Key Stage 4. This lack of choice was presented as something which both limited and enhanced their experience of art.

### Extract 4

*Interviewer: So do you feel like in the way lessons are now until you get towards the end it would be better if you got a little bit more personal choice going on there in those lessons?*

Yeah a more personal choice of what you want to draw because they used to just like get flowers or a bottle I like drawing flowers I don't mind that, when it's something boring like a bottle

*Interviewer Yeah so you think making those personal choices?*

*You see the detail in it, there's just not enough there to draw*

*Interviewer: It doesn't appeal to you to draw?*

Yeah

*Interviewer: Yeah so do you feel if you had more of those personal choices that it would have a more positive affect on the way your art is?*

*I reckon it would because you'd want to do it, do more detail, you'd want to have more graphic to it. More detail, you would spend as much time on it I reckon like, when you get home you like ah I got homework not really bothered because it's not something you wanted to do*

*Male Year 11 student*

In the extract above direct instruction on what to draw is aligned with restricting artistic freedom by preventing the student from drawing their subject matter of choice and making the activity 'boring'. It is important to note that this teaching practice is spoken about in the past tense which indicates that it is something that was an issue in the early stages of education but is no longer relevant now the student is in Year 11. In the second part of the extract the student suggests that freedom of choice would lead to more internal motivation to engage in art. This suggests that meaningful art experiences should come from within and therefore students need more freedom to make their own choices in art lessons. This is further supported in the final line of the extract where more choice is aligned with 'wanting to do' homework and spend time engaging in art activities outside of the classroom.

#### Extract 5

I think the other projects they're designed to make you do a variety of things so I guess that's good that you don't have to stick to the same thing all the time but it is a bit controlled in what you do

*Male Year 11 student*

Lack of choice was not always discussed negatively. In this extract the student suggests that limited choice forces students to engage in art activities that they would not necessarily engage in. A prescriptive curriculum is construed as an opportunity to undertake a variety of art 'projects' giving a broader and more well rounded experience.

## **Support in the classroom**

Children in all age groups spoke positively about the kinds of help and support they received from their teachers and peers during art lessons. The following sections of the analysis examine the kinds of classroom support discussed in the interviews in detail.

### *Teacher support*

Many students spoke positively about teacher demonstration and how it gave them a model to work from.

#### Extract 6

*Interviewer: Do you ever get any sort of help from your teacher?*

I don't normally get any help but if there's something I'm doing and that I not sure how to draw then I'd ask them

*Interviewer: What kind of help would your teacher give you then?*

He would get another piece of paper and then draw something on that or on the board and you would kind of look at it then realise what he's doing then do it

*Interviewer: Do you find that helpful when you need it?*

Yeah he's dead helpful'

*Female Year 9 Student*

In this quote 'help' is presented as something that is not normally received in art lessons. However, the student is comfortable asking for support when it is needed. **This positions the student as a confident artist who requires minimal**



support and intervention from the teacher. When support is needed the importance of modelling from the teacher is stressed. This suggests that in order to support students successfully teachers should focus on skills and demonstrate the processes needed to tackle a specific element of the piece that the student is struggling with.

This highlights a number of things in relation to good teaching practices. First, it is important that teachers give children the space to work on their art and only intervene when asked. Second, it highlights the importance of having specialist knowledge. The teacher must be able to confidently demonstrate a wide range of techniques to the students so they can learn through example. According to Cox (1992) this is a particular issue for children in primary education as generalist teachers – who do not necessarily have any experience with art themselves – deliver art lessons. Finally, students need to feel that help is on hand as and when they need it.

### *Teacher Feedback*

The majority of Secondary School pupils, in both Key Stage 3 and 4, mentioned how the feedback they received from their teachers included grades and remarks on how to improve their art work.

### Extract 7

*Interviewer: Yeah and then when you're doing your projects do you get feedback from your teacher sort of regularly?*

*Yeah that's good, that's ok you should add more of that I'm happy with that*

*Interviewer: Yeah so do you find that useful as well with the feedback?*

I like it even more when the teachers comment on it because I know they've had more experience working with it and it's like when an adult says it's good, it means a lot, it's like you've personally done it just as good as what they would have done

*Male Year 11 Student*

#### Extract 8

*Interviewer: Yeah and do you get sort of lots of feedback from your teachers on the projects that you do?*

Yeah like when it's been marked and everything especially if it's not, they won't say oh this is good, this is good because or the tiny bits you could improve and everything because it's kind of always going for the very best you can like reaching your potential and everything. But it's kind of, that's kind of a lot of what this school is they're very big on success! They're quite good, like the feedback you won't just get A\* you'll get A\* a bit of written as well which I find's quite good because it looks like they've not just gone oh yeah they've actually paid attention to it, which is good.

*Female Year 11 student*

These extracts illustrate that teacher feedback was highly valued and spoken about in a positive manner. Indeed, teacher feedback is presented as a demonstration of the teacher's superior knowledge of art and evidence that they have actually spent time engaging with and considering the student's art work.

The focus on experience also points to the importance of having a specialist teacher. As evidenced in extract 7 feedback from adults is given a privileged status 'I like it even more when the teachers comment on it'. If the teacher is seen as a practising artist or an expert in the field their opinion is valued as it is based on expert knowledge which cannot be collected from other sources such as their peers.

Evidence that the teacher had spent time thinking about the work and had not just graded it is important. In extract 8 this kind of expert, written feedback is construed as something which helps the student 'reach their potential and everything.' Teacher feedback is presented as crucial element which facilitates the student's personal development as an artist. This combination of the expert status of the teacher written feedback sends a strong message to the student that they have created something of worth. The art they have created is positioned as something which has relevance to the 'adult world' and therefore artistic expression is of value.

Given the importance of feedback it is concerning that students in Key Stages 1 and 2 did not discuss teacher feedback. This suggests that children in these Key Stages do not receive formal feedback from their teacher. Teacher feedback during these stages could reinforce the importance of art and challenge the idea held by many children in this stage of education that art is useless (Holt, 1997).

### *Peer guidance*

The kinds of help and guidance offered by the students' peers mirrored the support offered by teachers. Many students spoke about how their friends would take the role of teacher and demonstrate how to do something the student was struggling with. A major difference between teacher and peer guidance was that direction intervention from other students was welcomed.

### Extract 9

*Interviewer: to help you. Have you ever helped your friends with anything in art lessons?*

*Yeah*

*Interviewer: What kind of things have you helped them with?*

Well I was sitting next to my friend and she was drawing the feet, because it was bare footed children and so I. She couldn't draw them because the feet were going too big so I just got my pencil and a rubber and I rubbed out just at the top of the toes and I did one toe and she carried on.

*Female Year 6 Student*

The extract above explores the value of peer intervention and acceptance of changes made to artwork by another student. *The student positions herself as someone who knows when another student is struggling and steps in without an explicit request. Furthermore, her intervention involves changing and*

partially completing another student's artwork and this is construed as helpful as it enables the students to 'carry on' and complete the piece. This type of intervention contrasts sharply with the teacher intervention discussed in extract 6 which centred on minimal help which focuses on demonstration.

### *Peer feedback*

Students also spoke about the importance of peer feedback. This could take the form of by providing advice on how to improve their art project and advice on whether to adjust certain factors in their artwork.

### Extract 10

*Interviewer: Yeah, yeah so again it's sort of guidance?*

Reassurance sort of thing from your friends

*Interviewer: Yeah and do you do the same back to them?*

Yeah, hundreds, like people will go that's good, like I like it when people say that, it makes me feel proud of myself what I've done and what I've achieved from that drawing.

*Male Year 11 student*

In this extract positive peer feedback is linked with 'reassurance' a 'proud' feeling and a sense of achievement. This suggests that art lessons can support relationships between children and aid personal growth as suggested by Barnes (2002) and O'Connor (2000). It also positions art as a subject which provides a sense of 'achievement'.

## Improving the art experience

All the students interviewed spoke positively about their experiences of art in the classroom regardless of the Key Stage they belonged to. When it came to improving the art experience students requested more time for art.

### Extract 11

*Interviewer: ...so do you enjoy your art lessons at school then?*

*Ah I love them. I just want to do art every single day*

*Interviewer: Do you? Do you have art lessons every week or only now and then?*

Um, only now and then. But sometimes we have it like every week but it's very rare because like we have to do like maths and stuff

*Yeah and all the other things?*

Yeah and we're coming up to our SATs so we have to practice for that

*Female: Year 6 student*

In this extract there a discrepancy is constructed between the current art provision and the desired art provision. Art is presented as a topic which has a sporadic place in the curriculum due to pressure from the SATs and topics related to this examination such as maths and English. This presents art as a dispensable subject that can be squeezed out of the curriculum in order to make way for more important topics which are formally assessed. The 'rarity' of consistent art lessons suggests that children in Key Stages 1 and 2 would

benefit from having dedicated art classes in the timetable like the students in Key Stages 3 and 4. Regular art lessons would provide children with more opportunity to engage with art and develop as artists. It would also reinforce the importance of art by aligning it with other important topics such as maths.

In addition to more time for art many students and particularly those in Key Stages 1 and 2 spoke of the value of having a visit from a working artist.

### Extract 12

*Interviewer: Would you like anything like say an adult artist coming in to talk to the class and maybe teach you some things?*

Yeah that would be good, that would be really good

*Interviewer: Yeah what would you like about that?*

Um that would be really fun and like the artist coming into our class and like show how he draws or something like that

*Female Year 6 student*

To a certain extent this request echoes the requests made by children involved in the research conducted by Faulkner and Joubert (2006) for learning to take place out of the classroom. Having the opportunity to work with an artist would enable children to learn skills from an expert. It would also provide insight into the world of the adult artist – promoting the idea that art is not just for children.

## **Conclusions**

The findings in this analysis largely support those presented by [Burkitt et al. \(2010\)](#) in that children generally spoke positively about art and were satisfied with the art lessons they receive. However, the analysis of interview data from a range of students has enabled a number of key but subtle differences between the kinds of support and feedback that was appropriate from a teacher or a peer. Expertise was important in teacher support and feedback. Students expected teachers to be on hand to offer specialist technical support in the form of a demonstration when needed. The teacher's position of expert also made their written feedback important. Acknowledgement from an expert was valued by the students as evidence that they had created something worthwhile. Support and encouragement rather than expertise were important for peer feedback. Students reported that they were happy for their peers to complete their drawing for them and that the positive comments they received about their art made them feel good.

The differences between the style of intervention and the function of the feedback is noteworthy as in the research completed by [Burkitt et al. \(2010\)](#) many children reported that their teachers would alter their drawing. This was further supported by teacher's account of their teaching practice as they too reported that they would alter children's work. The interview data collected as part of the current study brings into question this particular teaching practice by suggesting that students are only happy for their peers to alter their artwork.

*What does this mean for art educators?*



Paying attention to children's voices and their perceptions of art lessons has highlighted a number of good practices for the teaching of art. Even though this particular study drew on a small sample of children and the findings cannot easily be generalised the analysis raised a number of issues that could be of interest for art educators.

For the students involved in this exploratory research art was an enjoyable topic because it did not follow the format used in other lessons. Students were offered more freedom to move around share ideas and relax. They were able to work collaboratively on the same piece of work, help out their friends and they felt uplifted by the comments they received about their artwork. This suggests that teachers should work to create a classroom environment where collaboration between children is encouraged and facilitated. Time in the lesson could also be handed over for peer feedback and discussion of artwork created in the class. This time would help build relationships between the students in the class and boost self esteem. Furthermore, the discussion of artwork would help develop children's art appreciation and the vocabulary needed for sensitive, critical discussion of art.

The Key Stage 3 and 4 students interviewed gave insight into how teachers can successfully balance the teaching positions of expert, facilitator and philosopher. These students spoke about the importance of having the freedom to create but at the same time having an expert teacher on hand to offer help when asked. Written comments on the completed artwork were valued. This description neatly captures the three teaching positions

presented in the English curriculum for art. Key stage 1 and 2 students would benefit from use of this model and access to a specialist teacher.

Finally, within these interviews a need for art to have a regular slot in the Key Stage 1 and 2 timetable and for children to have the experience of working with practising artists was identified. Movement towards a more consistent presence of art in the curriculum and visits from professional artists could help challenge a curriculum which Graham (2009, p. 85) describes as an “uninteresting and uninspiring” . This change could possibly encourage children’s interest in art and their artistic development.

### *Ways forward*

This analysis offers further evidence that there is a conflict between the decline in interest in drawing and drawing development reported in developmental research and children’s reported experiences of art. Given the tension between the accounts of art education offered by adult researchers and the children themselves further research in this area is needed. A larger scale qualitative research project could be conducted in this area to give further insight into the issues reported here. Such a project could enable the children themselves to take more active role in the research process. Faulkner and Joubert (2006) have demonstrated the children can be trained as researchers and work alongside the research team to ensure that the research focus is relevant to them. Future research in this area could involve students devising their own interview schedules to make sure that the interviews are answering the questions which are important to them.

Furthermore, students could interview their teachers as well as each other. This opens the possibility for teachers to become involved in the research too and hear first hand account from students on their personal experiences of art in the classroom.

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